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## FINGER PRINTING IN NEW YORK CITY

We would lay special stress on the fact that, if the probation system is destined to meet with the public acceptance and development it seems to deserve, then the nature and general view of the courts must inevitably change gradually in the direction indicated in the foregoing paragraph; and one may reasonably hope that before long probation work will be the main work of the local courts. The present time, therefore, would appear to afford an excellent opportunity for commencing such an alteration in the methods of selecting magistrates as will pave the way for so desirable a development.

"It seems to follow naturally from the above considerations that the best security for the selection of efficient justices of the peace would be found in a greater development of the probation system, whereby a large body of cultured social workers of both sexes, derived, perhaps, from different strata of society, might be induced to devote themselves to practical dealing with the problems connected with crime. It should then become the practice to select magistrates from the best of these, thus securing exactly the character, capacities and experience required in a good magistrate.

"Doubtless most of them might have to be paid a good salary, and thus some considerable initial expense would be entailed. This, however, would almost certainly be recovered in money saved on prisons and other undesirable items, and many times over in moral and industrial gains."

R. H. G.

### POLICE—IDENTIFICATION.

**Finger Printing in New York City Magistrates' Courts.**—The Committee on Criminal Courts of the New York City Charity Organization Society, recently published a twelve-page pamphlet setting forth reasons why the finger print system should be extended in the Magistrates' Courts of that city, and giving an estimate of the probable cost of operating the system as it should be operated. The system has been used very successfully in the night court for women for about two years. The Committee recommends that the system be extended to all of the District Magistrates' Courts in the burroughs of Manhattan and the Bronx and that finger prints taken in one court be photographed and sent to the other courts. The salaries of nine additional employees and of supplies for one year are estimated at about \$24,000. By enabling the courts to distinguish first offenders and repeaters, however, this expenditure would be in the direction not only of increased efficiency, but also economy.

The Criminal Courts Committee of Brooklyn has urged also that the finger print system be established in the Magistrates' Courts of that borough. The cost is estimated at about \$15,000.

The following is taken verbatim from the pamphlet referred to above:

### PRESENT DIFFICULTIES DUE TO THE LACK OF RECORDS.

"A visitor at either of the Night Courts, or at almost any day session of a Magistrate's court in New York, will see some person brought before the Magistrate on the charge of intoxication, and say, 'Judge, it is the first time.' It may be the first time or the second time or the twentieth time and this fact not be revealed by the records now in use. A careful study of the commitments to the Workhouse has shown that some men have been there for intoxication as often as forty, fifty and even sixty-five

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times. Some were spending their lives as 'guests' of the municipality. *Nevertheless, if one of these men was convicted again to-morrow and chose to give a fictitious name, there would be nothing whatever in the court records to distinguish him from a new offender.* The same is true of the habitual vagrant and of the one whose conduct is habitually disorderly. A common offense, classed as vagrancy, is begging in the streets. Persons have been known to make a livelihood by this means year in and year out, but there is nothing in the court records to prove the identity of such persons. Rowdyism in public conveyances has become a prominent form of disorderly conduct. In such cases there is again nothing to distinguish a new from an old offender. Magistrates' Courts are given jurisdiction over first offenders in cases of automobile speeding. Under the present system there is no possibility of the magistrate determining whether the man is or is not a first offender.

"When a new offender is brought into court on one of these charges, nothing so much exonerates him from severe punishment as the proof that he has never been in court before. His case requires very different treatment from that of the chronic offender. When the magistrate is able to learn from the records that the defendant is a beginner, and perhaps needs, more than anything else, strengthening of his moral fibre, he has the opportunity of making a wiser decision, and may prevent new offenders from becoming 'chronic.' When the records show the defendant to be a hardened offender and, therefore, less amenable to reformation, the Magistrate can impose a lengthy term of workhouse incarceration with an untroubled mind.

### IMPROVED TREATMENT OF PROSTITUTION CASES RESULTING FROM EFFICIENT RECORDS.

"Finger-printing defendants, after conviction in the Magistrates' Courts, is not a new proposition, because since September 1st, 1910, *this system has been in very successful operation in the Women's Night Court.* In the case of the prostitute, the magistrate has before him, prior to pronouncing sentence, an absolutely accurate record indicating whether it is the woman's first offense, or whether she is an old offender, and what the prior dispositions were. He therefore has the data necessary for an intelligent consideration and a wise disposition of the case. When shown to be a new offender the woman is very often released on probation. Finger-printing in the prostitution cases not only distinguishes the new from the old offender, but shows the number of times the old offender has been convicted. During the first three months of 1912 two convictions were for the 11th time, one for the 10th time, three for the 9th time, 11 for the 8th time, 25 for the 7th time, 44 for the 6th time, 79 for the 5th time, 115 for the 4th time, 184 for the 3rd time, and 226 for the 2nd time. During the same three months 466 persons were convicted and found to be new offenders.

### SOME ADVANTAGES OF FINGER-PRINTING.

"The finger-print records will indicate at once whether the person is a new or an old offender. The magistrate need not be racked with a doubt in estimating a person's character and past history, and is better able to determine whether he is a fit subject for the suspended sentence, for probation,

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"Another advantage of no small importance is that lying in regard to former convictions is found by the prisoner to be useless. In the past in the prostitution cases the more hardened offender often made the plea of first offense, in order to avoid a severe sentence; and the young girl in court for a reformatory, or for a long workhouse sentence merely to prevent his being a nuisance to society.

the first time confessed to previous convictions, in order to be considered too hopeless for a reformatory with its longer term of commitment. When finger-print records exist the defendant knows that nothing is gained from subterfuge. When asked her name she may be Lulu Smith one time, Sadie Jones the next, and something else the next, but consultation of the records, requiring less than two minutes, makes it plain that through her several *aliases* she is known to be one and the same individual. In the prostitution cases the tendency to give various *aliases* has decreased. One of the women mentioned above as convicted for the eleventh time has given the same name throughout.

### IMPERATIVE IN CASE OF DRUNKENNESS.

"Subdivision 6 of Section 693 of Chapter 551 of the Laws of 1910, and subdivision 5 of Section 88 of Chapter 659 of the Laws of 1910 make it imperative that magistrates, and also officers of the Board of Inebriety, have at their disposal accurate information as to the number of offenses of persons convicted for public intoxication. *This can be ascertained accurately only by the establishment of the finger-print method of identification.*

"In addition to this, Section 72 of Chapter 659 of the Laws of 1910 make it necessary that magistrates have accurate information as to first offenders violating the motor-vehicle law. It is again impossible for them to have this information without finger-printing after conviction. Moreover, *the first offender is entitled to the protection which this system would afford him.*

### FINGER-PRINTS A PROTECTION TO THE NEW OFFENDER.

"Finger-prints afford the most *humane* method of identifying. One still hears occasionally a reference to the stigma of finger-printing, but fortunately its civil and commercial uses both in this and other countries are becoming so extensive that this prejudice is passing away. One of the latest phases of the commercial use is in savings banks. Finger-print records can never be read by the general public; in fact, only by the official expert. Having one's finger-print impressions on file does not by any means involve humiliation, as is the case with the picture in the rogues' gallery, or a written record of one's bodily scars and deformities. It should be remembered, too, that while finger-printing is useful in showing the record of the hardened offender, it is just as useful in proving that, from the point of view of the courts, the new offender's life was heretofore blameless.

### PLAN OF INSTALLING A FINGER-PRINT SYSTEM.

"The success of finger-printing in the Magistrates' Courts will depend upon the completeness and the immediate availability of records. A man may be arraigned for drunkenness or vagrancy or disorderly conduct on the Bowery one time, and in Harlem the next. It would be necessary therefore that all the courts keep complete finger-print files, in order to know this

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man's record. It would not be practicable to bring all persons arrested on one offense to the same court, as is done at present in prostitution cases.

"Of several methods considered for installing finger-printing, the following seems to be the most simple and practicable. In Manhattan and the Bronx there are eight day courts and two night courts, where persons are tried for the offenses in question. Two night courts, being in the same building with two day courts, will use the same finger-print rooms and files. When a person is convicted in any one of these courts his finger-print impressions will be taken, his record looked up and shown to the magistrate immediately, as is done at present in prostitution cases; sentence can then follow, according to the merits of the case. If the person is a new offender the finger-print impressions will be sent to a central bureau to be photographed, and after giving them the proper number the central bureau will forward to each court a copy of the photographed impressions to be placed on file. If the same person is again convicted in any one of these courts a record of his previous conviction or convictions, together with the dispositions which followed, will be immediately available. The reproduction of the impressions by photograph for the several courts will be necessary only once, because on later convictions each court will already have on file this person's finger-print impressions, which can be referred to by number.

"In case of the repeater, therefore, the Central Bureau will not make and distribute photographic impressions, but will instruct each court to add to the person's record (readily referred to by number previously given it at the Central Bureau) the fact of a new conviction. Or if it is found simpler his record will be corrected to include the new conviction at the Central Bureau, and a copy sent to each court to replace the previous record.

"It should be remembered that the above are intended as *court* records, and not police records."

A. W. T.

### MISCELLANEOUS.

**Desertion of Wives and Children by Emigrants to America.**—Among the many problems brought forth as a result of immigration into the United States from foreign countries, one of the most pitiful and most worthy of the attention of social workers is the condition resulting from the desertion of their families by emigrants.

It occurs quite frequently that an emigrant, after staying for a few years in the United States, or even before this period, neglects and refuses to send any money for the support of his wife and his children, and in many cases even severs his ties with his family completely.

We can differentiate and observe three classes of cases:

1. The alien is living in adultery with another woman.
2. He starts proceedings in divorce against his wife who resides abroad, and in most cases, due to lax divorce laws, is successful in procuring it. He remarries without providing for the family left behind him abroad, in any manner whatsoever.
3. In some instances he marries without procuring his divorce and thus commits bigamy.

This state of affairs is seriously endangering the morals of society in the foreign settlements of our cities, and works, on the other hand, a great hardship on the families of unscrupulous husbands and fathers. These